

Ritual and Space in the Middle Ages. Proceedings of the Harlaxton Symposium 2009

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This collection of essays, first presented at the Harlaxton Symposium in 2009, brings together a range of researchers interested in the intellectual and cultural history of Europe, under two equally broad and controversial themes. Frances Andrews's introduction goes some way to binding the ideas together. However, the contributors are strong empiricists, and the wider theoretical references are often lacklustre: the occasional nod to Bourdieu or Lefebvre usually does little more than situate the essay comfortably within the remit of the collection's themes: the real insights are in the historical details. Rather than take the essays in order, below I attempt to find some of the parallels between the essays so that their historical accounts might speak a theory of their own.

Jill Caskey's essay on the *ars sacra* of Southern Italy introduces problems between analyses of different media which naturally prevail throughout the volume. Acknowledging the astounding contribution of Bruzelius's *The Stones of Naples* to medieval architectural studies, Caskey nonetheless argues that buildings and reliquaries should not be treated as having the same potential dynamic with kingly ritual.⁽¹⁾ In particular, she argues that the French character of Sicilian architecture under Angevin rule was less easily manipulated than the smaller, more quickly constructed sacred objects. A memorable image from the essay is that of the Baresi running along the walls of their city, displaying their treasure during a siege. The besieging Normans interpreted the act as a barbaric lack of respect of such sacred objects – but Caskey reveals that the Byzantine roots of the Baresi culture suggest that in truth the scared citizens were using their artefacts apotropaically.

The construction of artefacts in the late 13th century, Caskey claims, was based on the premise that Capetian power needed to be reflected in Angevin power; that this was the strongest claim to sovereignty – not least because of the status of Paris as a new Jerusalem following the incorporation of the relics of Christ by Louis IX. Caskey focuses on the Christological-monarchical rendering of the reliquary of the True Cross, and the locally inspired reliquary bust of St Januarius, a beautiful and excellently preserved example of the genre – and deftly shows how the aesthetics of both place them within the same visual world.

Caskey also shows how the construction of these objects accompanied a shift in time. The introduction of the Use of Paris into Bari in 1296 caused a 'shift in the grid of time and space', not least because of the very specific spatial referents in the Parisian calendar, such as the consecration of Notre Dame, which replaced locations and festivities inherent in the Baresi calendar. The analysis of the reliquaries is astute and considered, weaving art historical, Christological detail and political history, noting not only the aggrandising techniques of the Angevins, but also the antagonism this caused to the Baresi: in 1300, three insurgents killed the chaplain in his own church. The relations between town and church will no doubt be further unravelled through Caskey's future work on the processional role of the relics, perhaps in a manner not dissimilar from the examination of Lincoln by James Stokes in his contribution to the volume.

Four essays focus on processions through late medieval English towns. Helen Carrel's contribution, despite the broad claim of its title ('The rituals of town crown relations in post black death England'), centres mainly on the relation of the Queen to petitioners hailing from towns she visited. James Stokes' essay examines, in fine detail, the ritual of the Ascension in Lincoln, which notably was organised jointly by the town *commune* and the Cathedral chapter. John McKinnel looks at the Easter week in Durham, and the effect of the single source of sovereign power which existed there, the Prince Bishop. Finally Hans Kleineke revisits a monograph from 1932 entitled *Some Disputes Between City and Cathedral Authorities of Exeter* (2), in light of his extensive research into the records of Exeter in the National Archives, to be published later this year.

McKinnel's essay explores the inside/outside space of the Easter sequence in Durham, and the Christological symbolism. The liturgical rituals peculiar to the city, McKinnel argues, were developed so that lay participation in the rite increased as the week progressed, moving from the cloistered Maundy Thursday feasting, through the display of the cross to the expectant crowds on Good Friday, the miraculous appearance of the image of Christ and its presentation at the temporary Easter Sepulchre on Sunday, and finally Ascension day, and culminating in the procession of the relics of the northern Saints, including the gigantic relic-banner of St Cuthbert.

Carrel, following Anthony Musson, claims that personal contact with and petitions of the Queen were not extraordinary events, but were part of the normal process of petitioning. However, she also claims that gifts (of mercy) from the Queen had to be spontaneous in order to still be considered extraordinary gifts. These contradictory claims can easily be reconciled through an elementary understanding of the political economy of gifts familiar to anthropologists through Mauss, Malinowsky, et al – and thoroughly integrated into medievalism by Patrick Geary, among others.

Nonetheless, while the theory of ritual is unworked, the examples chosen are illuminating, and well summarised. Anne of Bohemia's visit to Shrewsbury and the subsequent Charter (1389) establishing a *commune* is carefully analysed through the image of the King and Queen in the historiated initial of the document itself. Nonetheless, the image remains enigmatic: is the queen delivering or receiving a petition, or is it the charter itself?

The discussion of the Bristol petitioning is detailed, and Carrel has revitalised many of the otherwise lifeless names involved. Further examination of the everyday functions of the Royal chambers, how the royal couple acted there, and how petitioners entered it would be central to developing the themes Carrel encounters. In terms of space alone, the fabric accounts of these chambers would expose further the concepts of sexuality, gender, and political space.(3)

Royal visits again feature in David Ditchburn's detailed study of the rituals surrounding the marriage of James II of Scotland to Mary of Guelders in 1449. Ditchburn focuses for the most part on the tournament which took place several months prior to the marriage, arguing that this acted as a ritual defeat of the Burgundians by the Douglas knights, with the King acting as ultimate sovereign. This is particularly evidenced by James II's snub of the Livingstones, the one-time regents during his minority.

Hannes Kleineke's contribution introduces another royal visit, to Exeter in 1452, and describes the pageantry surrounding it. But whereas Carrel and McKinnel present unity and accord, Kleineke moves on to reveal discord and quarrels. The royal visit is presented as part of a move towards regal control, ultimately resolving the differences between town and church by exerting authority over the mayor and the elect, and thus becoming a new, unequivocal force in Exeter life. This followed in the wake of disputes between the town and the chapter house which manifested themselves, at least on one occasion, in a physical confrontation during the ceremony of Ascension, the accounts of which Kleineke deftly deciphers.

The Feast of the Ascension is also the focus of James Stokes' essay. Drawing heavily on his own edition of the Lincolnshire volume of the Records of Early English Drama series, Stokes provides a good deal of linguistic evidence that the dramatic event involved a procession up the main hill in Lincoln from the guildhall at the base to the cathedral and castle at the summit, and that it involved mechanical elements for the Ascension of Mary at the end of the procession. These details flesh out a wider theory that the historical development of the ritual was one of an increasing focus on corporeality (in parallel with the increasing popularity of the Feast of Corpus Christi), and that the production became more centred on the mechanical elements.

The citizens' guild, that of St Anne, kept a priest at the chantry chapel of St Michael on the Hill to organise the annual procession and play. In 1488 the priest was described as *ingeniosus*, from which Stokes makes intriguing, compelling parallels with that other *ingeniator*, Brunelleschi.

The Easter liturgy and ingenious mechanics are also the themes of Andrew Jotischky's rich and fully researched history of the holy fire at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. While in Durham a temporary structure was built to mirror the tomb of Christ, in Jerusalem the church held the relic of the tomb itself, within the building erected on the site reputed to be Golgotha. The tomb and church were the focus of an important and site-specific fire ritual, which Jotischky argues dates back to the 9th century. A lamp, taken into the tomb by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, was miraculously lit from within, and the fire then handed out to the lamps and candles of the attendant bishops and congregation.

Jotischky's summary is based on 24 accounts in five languages, if we include the English sources, and spanning the entire history of the rite. He is thus able not only to uncover its peculiarities, but also to suggest reasons for its historical origination and progression. A potent example of this progression is the failure of the miracle in 1101 AD, following the expulsion of the Greek Orthodox priests by the newly installed Frankish crusaders. A ritual itself perhaps, this failure encouraged the Franks to welcome the Greek and Melkite Christians back into their fold, after which the miracle was duly functional – possibly, Jotischky argues, because the secrets of its mechanics were held by those same Christians who had been thrust out, placing the ritual within an ethnic and political history. This he also does in his account of the origin of the rite, situating it in the singular intervention of the Carolingians following the conquest of Jerusalem by the Abbasid Caliphate in the 9th century.

Like Kleineke's essay, Jotischky's is partly a revisiting of older secondary works: the Arabic sources are taken from an essay of 1914, and much of the detail on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre surely derives from Colin Morris' excellent *Sepulchre of Christ*. Nonetheless, the reworking and amalgamation of sources shows Jotischky to be an excellent historian with a gift for prose, evidenced also by his recent *book on monastic fasting*.⁽⁴⁾

Lucy-Anne Hunt continues discussion of the Frankish control of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in

Jerusalem, focussing on the carved lintels above the South portals of the church, now in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem. Following Molly Lindner (1992), Hunt argues that the Passion scenes depicted therein are not only a reflection of the actual pilgrimage route through the Holy Land, but specifically portray the Augustinian sites, the images mirroring a particular and intentional ritual use of space.

Two other pilgrimages are brought into the discussion. The first is that of the Icon of the Virgin and Child at Saydnaya, again (as in Jotischky's essay) a Melkite centre during the Abbasid Caliphate. The analysis, however, is somewhat confused, the scope seemingly to attempt to rationalise the miracles apparent at the shrine. The second is the pilgrimage to the monastery of St Shenoute on the feast of the desert, described in an itinerary published in 1998, which also includes visits to other sites, such as a lost icon of St George. Hunt makes an all too brief, tantalising note about the recopying of this text in the 16th century as an assertion of Christian identity, following the disturbance of the relics and the ruining of the monastery. Nonetheless the three examples do not really seem to hang together, though they certainly propose rituals parallel to Jotischky's explication of the Holy Fire.

Pilgrimage takes on a new meaning with Rob Meens' engaging discussion of the grave of St Martin of Tours in the early middle ages. Weaving the conflictual elements of Kleineke's discussion of Exeter back into that of saintly tombs, Meens develops the discussion into that of asylum, which he glosses as the tension between reserving access to the sacred for the pure, while still allowing access to the impure for acts of mercy and forgiveness.

Three stories illuminate the progression of this discourse. The first is the refuge granted to Eberulf, a renegade treasurer of King Guntram, attacked in the *atrium* of the church of St Martin by the envoy of the king. The account is taken from Gregory, whose letter served as a *rapprochement* against the king's action. Second is the refuge granted to a cleric who had escaped from an ecclesiastical gaol in Orleans. King Theodulf's soldiers enter the church with the *pauperes* of the city and attack the Orleanais. Again, the account is known from a rebuke, in this case the long exchange between Charlemagne (Theodulf's lord) and his advisor, Alcuin of York. The result of the incident was a long and, literally, tortuous investigation of the people of Tours, culminating in a set of legal clarifications on the law of asylum by Charlemagne.

The third incident is given the greatest space: that involving Count Fulk Nerra of Tours, for the understanding of which Meens provides us with an appended document declaring the rite of the 'humiliation of saints', with his translation as well. After Fulk invaded the *claustrum* of St Martin, and demolished a house belonging to the cellarer, the monks of Tours ritually disturbed the bones and relics of their saints, placed them on the ground and surrounded them with thorns. Only once the Count had returned to repent for his sins were the relics replaced. The *humiliatio* was also accompanied by a sort of liturgical strike, in which only pilgrims were allowed access to the church. Importantly, Meens posits that the origination of Fulk's entrance into the church with his soldiers was the pursuit of an enemy – and thus was another act transgressing the right of asylum.

Meens' essay involves the violation of a space, and in two of the instances the invaded site is not the church itself but a different enclosed area: the *atrium* or the *claustrum*. These areas are the focus of Sible de Blaauw's contribution on the early Christian constructions at Tyre and Rome. The essay is a passionate entreaty for early Christian churches not to be seen simply as bastard forms of the Roman basilica, but for the dynamic relation of form and function to be examined. The key spatial concept here, though it is not put as such by de Blaauw, is the binary of inside and outside, already familiar from the relation between procession and sepulchre in the Easter liturgies discussed above.

De Blaauw acknowledges the domestic roots of the term *atrium*, reminding us that the closer parallel is actually with the Roman *peristylum*, not the basilica – though he also implies that there may have been a dialogue between domestic and ecclesiastic architecture by the late antique period, citing the placement of the atrium at Gamzigrad, Serbia (an active archaeological site).

He employs Krautheimer's analyses of Old St Peter's in Rome to show the kind of *atria* erected throughout

the Empire from Constantine's decree onwards. Using texts as well (Paulinus' letters; Eusebius' history) which amply describe an atrium with colonnades, de Blaauw reconstructs the buildings as they were, in all the metaphorical ambiguity of the typological references. This ambiguity contributes to de Blaauw's argument for the liminality of the atrium, its in-between role separating the baptised from the uninitiated, but still within a sacred space, still accessible to 'liturgical traffic.'

Drawing inspiration from de Blaauw's reconstructions of the papal basilicas in Rome, Donal Cooper's contribution uses Marcia Hall's studies of rood screens and *tramezzi* to investigate the implications of spatial divides in Tuscan churches. The mendicant constructions provide a good focus for the discussions of space for, as Cooper points out, we can assume that the particular examples reflect a generalised pattern for that order – which we can check against the chapter legislation.

Cooper uses the 14th-century interior plan of San Francesco in Arezzo, known from the exceptional surviving drawing, to argue that the lateral spaces were left vacant for chantries and personal altars. This hints towards a different notion of architectural time from that of the projects described by de Blaauw, one in which expectancy of future monuments is built into the initial structure – an observation which will surely benefit from Marvin Trachtenberg's recent intervention.[\(5\)](#)

The fresco within San Domenico in Arezzo is also discussed in terms of an inside/outside binary, as it depicts an extramural sermon; Cooper notes that many *tramezzi*, to which the fresco would have been near, were constructed with access to external pulpits for this very purpose. Using the reconstruction of the spatial arrangement of San Francesco, combined with the surviving frescos from San Domenico, Cooper makes a compelling argument for the mutual reliance of spatial and pictorial elements.

Cooper challenges the histories which state that the tripartite division was definitively between the laity, the male laity, and the clergy, instead using the evidence to show that the personal chapels beyond the screens must have been accessible to noble men and women. The extrication of this evidence from the notarial documents in the Florentine archives is both imaginative and detailed. As he succinctly put it, 'these sources suggest that lay access beyond the *tramezzo* screen was already extensive in the later fourteenth and early fifteenth-centuries, and did not result from a later process of 'privatising' church space during the Renaissance'.

Catherine Lawless focuses on three of the secondary tier of female saints in medieval Florence. Turning away from Catherine, Lucia and Mary Magdalene, the essay delves into the role of Saints Agatha, Reparata and Anne in the visual imaginary of the *commune*. Drawing on a her encyclopaedic knowledge of Tuscan images, Lawless sets the popular devotion in the context of Bernardino of Siena's vindictive against women, and the contemporary restrictions on women's freedom to move through religious space. Of particular note is the recognition that the lack of female saints in the sculpture of Orsanmichele is due to the lack of any one female saint acting as the patron of a Florentine guild.

Gender, partitions and wall paintings also all feature in Nicholas Rogers's article on the places in which the sacrament of confession took place in late medieval churches. The confessional booth was a Baroque invention; prior to this, other techniques of privacy were employed. Rogers uses an array of images from manuscripts to depict the ways in which priests made use of church space to construct *loci* which were personal but not away from public view, an important factor in the confession of women by male priests. Again stressing the interrelation of painted and architectural space in the role of the sacraments, Rogers suggests that images of the Seven Deadly Sins, and also those of gossiping women, could be indicative of places in which the confession was intended to be undertaken. The discussion of images of death is detailed and subtle, but often strays away from the subject at hand, and only indirectly seems to connect with the sacrament of confession.

Rogers makes reference to Julian Luxford's article on *momento mori*, and Luxford returns to deathly themes in his own contribution to the volume.[\(6\)](#) His essay examines the large tomb which stood at the heart of the church of the Carthusian convent in London. The resting place of the founder of the Charterhouse, Sir

Walter Manny, the monument has been gratifyingly reconstructed by Luxford from the two extant fragments. Drawing on this archaeological and art historical evidence, alongside textual sources, Luxford challenges the prevailing belief that such monuments were an unusual blight to the sparse Carthusian aesthetic. On the contrary, Luxford argues that by the 14th century such tombs were common in Charterhouses, the rules having been greatly relaxed.

Luxford claims that such monuments played an important part in the visual lives of the monks, as 'it is obvious that, in a physical sense, the average monk *saw* relatively little'. This is not necessarily so obvious, however, given the noble backgrounds from which many Carthusian monks emanated. While it is certainly true that the conventual life would have provided only a limited range of visual stimulants, this is not true of the monks' whole lives. In this manner, it is perhaps useful to separate the discourse of Carthusian life from its lived reality, in which monks, however self-convinced by their 'new' religious life in the convent, still bore the memories of their life in the laity.

To reinforce his argument of the impact of the tombs on the monks' imagination, Luxford draws on imagery relating the tomb and the monks cell through the metaphor of the *deadened* life of the Carthusian, of a man 'dead to the world'. However, the argument would be made stronger by reference to the rich architectural imagery prevalent in Carthusian-produced manuscripts, as studied by Michael Sargent, Ralph Hannah and Kathleen Scott, among others.

A more literal dead are the focus of Philip Morgan's overview of medieval memorials on battlefields, encompassing monumentality, place-names and church foundations. His discussion springs elegantly from the words of the Roman governor of Britain on the eve of battle, as reported by Cassius Dio: 'Let us, therefore, either conquer them or die on the spot. Briatin will be a noble monument for us, even though all the other Romans here should be driven out; for in any case our bodies shall for ever possess this land'.

The mechanics by which the land was thus memorialised through death are studied over a thousand-year period, although Morgan is clearly most at home in the 14th and 15th centuries. Battle Abbey, the relics of St Oswald at Oswestry, the burial pits of Agincourt – the murderous and the sacred sit side by side in this subject, on which there is clearly still a great deal of work to be done. Encouragingly, Morgan is not obsessed merely with memory, but also sees the benefit in theorising forgotten battles, those which would not be included in a 'gazeteer' of place-names.

Forgetting and disruption are central to Maurizio Campanelli's discussion of textual accounts of Rome, and the changing quality of time reflected in their historical imaginings of its past. Drawing on a daringly wide range of sources, Campanelli argues that a scholar in the high or late middle ages would have been able to understand Rome as a place whose sacredness was mapped onto its spaces, where divine intervention was constantly renewed through ritual, but that for an early medieval scholar, this was absent; there were topographies, but the ritual elements was absent. Campanelli sees this progression as due, in part, to the active intervention of humanists in the construction of Rome's history.

An example of continuity given is that the ancient right of asylum, discussed above in relation to the church of St Martin of Tours, was invoked by an inscription in the church of 'Sta Croce in Gerusalemme' in Rome, in order to support the shrine of Pope Silvester II. Specifically, the right of asylum was that established by Romulus, and its power is invoked to support the plenary indulgence (i.e. of *all* sins) granted to Sta Croce. This continuity is in the context of the utterly depleted power of Rome following the move of the Papacy to Avignon. Similarly, the early humanist Cavallini describes the Roman people as the *iura* of the city, whether ancient or contemporary; the authority of the Roman Senate is transferred to the College of Cardinals. This total continuity which Campanelli elucidates is given a poignant moment of pathos in the recognition that Cavallini wrote his description of Rome while in Avignon, where there was 'little to be done beyond closing oneself in with one's books to dream that, while everything changed in form, in Rome nothing had changed in substance'. While Petrarch, Cola di Rienzo and Biondo Flavio would stress a break with what became the 'middle' ages, for scholars like Cavallini and the anonymous author of the *Mirabilia romae*, continuity with the ancient Roman past was a primary method through which to strengthen the city's Christian *auctoritas*.

Uri Smilansky's contribution on the visual aspect of the *ars subtilior* teases out many of the more subtle themes of the collection, though its musical focus sets it apart. The *ars subtilior* (a disputed historical term) described the 14th-century musical avant-garde, the foci of which were not only an extraordinarily insular and self-referential approach to musical theory, but also to the notation by which it was transmitted. These notational experiments amount to not only codes, but enigma and riddles, equally prevalent in the artistic aspect as the linguistic. The music itself, the recordings of which Smilansky provides useful references to, is as eerie and codified as the manuscript pages.

Smilansky describes his essay as exploring 'space' in three ways: on the page; performance space; and the space occupied by the *ars subtilior* in society. The first of these explores, clearly, only two-dimensional space, although the tension between the necessity to reflect the changing song forms and the limitations of the medium, the manuscript, are as relevant today as in the 14th century. The third use of spatial metaphor – the space occupied, i.e. the social function of the art – is unfortunately demoted to a very base Marxian conclusion, attributing technicality in song-craft to the need for ostentatious skill in a precarious financial environment. It is clear that there is far more occurring in such art than merely the magnetism of capital, for this applies equally to the *as nova* or any remunerated music. There is surely more to the place of labour in cultural production than mere distinction.

The kernel which Smilansky surely wants to expose more is the relation between the notated page and the performance space, as he hints towards with regard to Guillaume Dufay's *Nuper rosarum flores*, composed for the consecration of Florence Cathedral, and, as Charles Warren and more recently Marvin Trachtenberg have attempted to show, relates in its mathematical, musical proportions to those of the architecture in which it was originally performed.⁽⁷⁾ The nexus of space on the page and space in the church will surely provide stimulating reassessments of the intellectual history of medieval space. The visual aspects of Smilansky's future edition of the works of Guillaume de Machaut are eagerly awaited, including Machaut's own dedicatory for Rheims Cathedral, *Messa de Notre Dame*.

In sum, the collection is perhaps greater than its parts, with many of the essays illuminating each other. While Andrews makes clear in her introduction that theories of ritual are familiar to – and have been well produced out of – medieval studies, less focus has been placed on original theories of space. With hope, some of the themes which I have mentioned above can be fleshed out over the coming years, to provide new theories of space and spatiality which do not rely on modernist tropes, but on an assessment of medieval society as it was.

Notes

1. C. Bruzelius, *The Stones of Naples. Church Building in Angevin Italy, 1266-1343* (New Haven, CT, 2004); see also Claudia Bolgia, review of *The Stones of Naples. Church Building in Angevin Italy, 1266-1343*

- , (review no. 469) <<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/469> [2]> [accessed 6 January 2012].[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. M. E. Curtis, *Some Disputes Between City and Cathedral Authorities of Exeter* (Manchester 1932).
[Back to \(2\)](#)
 3. P. Binski, *The Painted Chamber at Westminster* (London, 1986).[Back to \(3\)](#)
 4. I. Krackovskij, 'Le Feu sacté d'après le récit d'al-Biruni et d'autre écrivains musulmans du Xe au XIIIe siècle', *Xristianskij Vostok*, III/3 (1914), 225–317; C. Morris, *The Sepulchre of Christ and the Medieval West. From the Beginnings to 1600* (Oxford, 2005); A. Jotischy, *A Hermit's Cookbook. Monks, Food and Fasting in the Middle Ages* (London, 2011).[Back to \(4\)](#)
 5. M. Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time. From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion* (New Haven, CT, 2010).[Back to \(5\)](#)
 6. J. Luxford, 'The Sparham corpse panels. Unique revelations of death from fifteenth-century England', *Antiquaries Journal*, 90 (2010), 299–340.[Back to \(6\)](#)
 7. C. Warren, 'Brunelleschi's Dome and Dufay's Motet', *The Musical Quarterly*, 59 (1972), 92–105; M. Trachtenberg, 'Architecture and music reunited. A new reading of Dufay's *Nuper rosarum flores* and the cathedral of Florence', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54 (2001), 740–75.[Back to \(7\)](#)
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